AMERICAN USAGE OF THE WORD "FRONTIER" FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

JOHN T. JURICEK*

I. INTRODUCTION: THE TURNER DEFINITION

THE word "frontier" occurs with conspicuous frequency in twentieth-century writings on American history. There is an interesting story behind that fact. The history of American usage of this term is fascinating and complex, but heretofore has been poorly understood. In fact, modern historians have persistently misinterpreted what earlier Americans meant by "frontier" and the contexts in which they used the word. This paper is an attempt to provide an accurate sketch of the history of American usage of "frontier" before the present century. In order to clarify the contexts in which it has appeared some attention will be given to a few related terms. I shall illustrate my points with quotations where the meanings intended for "frontier" are as unambiguous as possible. This procedure will sharpen the outline of the word's history, but at the necessary cost of some oversimplification. Further, by examining the conditions of American westward expansion and the "world view" of those involved in it, I shall attempt to provide an historical explanation for the important changes in usage which occurred. Finally, the implications of all the above for "frontier" historiography will be explored.

Anyone with the least acquaintance with the literature of American history associates the word "frontier" with Frederick Jackson Turner and his famous "frontier thesis." Turner first propounded his stimulating hypothesis in his essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he read before a meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893. Turner's originality and his inspirational teaching won him an extraordinary influence on the minds of several generations of Americans. His "frontier" school of historiography has, until meeting severe criticism in recent years, dominated the writing of American history.

Most of those who take issue with Turner's interpretations point out that he used the word "frontier" in many different ways. Yet there has been a more or less passive acceptance of Turner's main definition of the word. Indeed, this sense of the term is almost the only one which appears in modern writings on American westward expansion. Here is the familiar passage from Turner's great essay:

> In this advance [of the American population westward], the frontier is the outer edge of the wave. . . .
> The American frontier is sharply distinguished from the European frontier—a fortified boundary line running through dense populations. The most significant thing about the American frontier is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land. In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile. The term is an elastic one, and for our purposes does not need sharp definition. We shall consider the whole frontier belt, including the Indian country and the outer margin of the "settled area" of the census reports.[1]

In another place Turner says: "In American thought and speech the term 'frontier' has come to mean the edge of settlement, rather than, as in Europe, the political boundary."[2] We must take note of two things here: (1) Turner states that the word "has come to mean" the outer edge of white settlement, thereby indicating his awareness of the fact that formerly it had different meanings, and (2) he implicitly serves notice that he is going to take further liberties with this "elastic" term. It is clear that Turner, unlike many later scholars, realized that the word "frontier" has undergone an important evolution in America. I shall now attempt to show that the definition Turner employed originated in the last stages of that evolution, that in fact it was a creature of the late nineteenth century. Before then, the term "frontier" in America had other meanings, nearly all of which were inherited with the word itself from Europe.

II. EARLY AMERICAN USAGE IN ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The English word "frontier," like its sister words in the Romance languages, is derived from the classical Latin root "frons" (front or forepart) by way of the later medieval Latin term "fronteria" (frontier or line of battle). The word

* The author, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Chicago, wrote the original version of this paper in 1964 for Professor Daniel J. Boorstin's seminar in American Intellectual History.

[1] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), p. 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

entered the English language through the intermediary of Old French, perhaps not long after the Norman Conquest and certainly by 1400. Since "frontier" is so closely related to similar terms in other languages of Western Europe, it should come as no surprise to learn that early American usage of the word was generally similar to the usages of Western Europe. Since, furthermore, what later became the United States was settled principally by Englishmen, it should be even less surprising to learn that early American usage of "frontier" was almost indistinguishable from that of England. Such are the facts, as the following account will indicate.

Any word as old as "frontier" naturally has been used in many senses which are now obsolete. At least three such definitions of this term have been employed in America. Two of them were derived from England; the other is of American origin. The first and by far the most common of these early meanings the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as follows: "A fortress on the frontier; a frontier town." Examples of this "outpost" sense of the word are not hard to find in early American sources. Turner himself cites at least two. In 1700 the Massachusetts General Court enumerated its fourteen "Frontier Towns," along with seven others, which "tho' they be not frontiers as those towns first named, yet lye more open than many others to an attack of an Enemy." [3] Jedidiah Morse, in his *American Geography* (1796), stated that Natchitoches in Louisiana "was a frontier on the Spanish settlements." [4] Similarly, we hear mention of "the frontier of Cumberland" (1792) and "the frontier of Warwasing" (1838).[5] We should note that this definition was not always confined to denoting frontier fortresses and towns, but sometimes was applied to "outposts" that were either much larger or much smaller. Thus, on the one hand, in 1754 Benjamin Franklin observed that "the British Colonies, bordering on the French, are properly Frontiers of the British Empire." [6] On the other hand, in 1815 Duncan McArthur, the American Commandant at Detroit, asserted that "every house in the Territory of Michigan is a frontier." [7]

The *Oxford English Dictionary* supplies the second obsolete meaning as follows: "A barrier against attack." Again, examples are readily found. In 1708 Thomas Nairne described South Carolina as "being a frontier, both against the French and the Spaniard." [8] In 1720 Governor Robert Johnson of South Carolina said that if there should be a war with France, "the other Plantations to which this Colony is a Frontier, would feel the effects of the French growing so powerfull in America." [9] Writing of the war with the French and Indians, in 1756 George Washington noted that "Potomack River, which is now our frontier, is deserted on the Maryland side 40 miles below Conocgch." [10] For a later example, in 1838 Moses Van Campen told of his apprehension on hearing that "about three hundred Indians . . . would . . . attack the whole chain of the frontier at the same time, on the same day." [11]

In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the third obsolete definition of the word is given as "A settler on the frontier; a frontier-man." This is the least common and shortest-lived of the three, and, unlike the others, was developed in America. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* erred in not identifying this definition as an Americanism, Sir William A. Craigie's subsequent *Dictionary of American English* (1940) correctly records its American origin and provides four illustrations dating from 1677 to 1726. This sense of the word was actually in use somewhat longer, as can be seen from the following examples. In the Carolina backcountry about 1765 a lusty ballad "was frequently sung to the tune of the Black Joke." One couplet ran:

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[3] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 42; see also, *ibid.*, p. 52.

[4] Quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* q. v. "frontier."

[5] *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (2 v., Washington, 1832–1834) **1**: p. 321; William L. Stone, *Life of Joseph Brant—Thayendanega* (2 v., New York, 1838) **2**: p. 169. The frontier of Cumberland was of course the famous settlement in Tennessee. Warwasing (or Wawarsing) was a town in Ulster County, New York.

[6] *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* ed. Leonard W. Labaree and Ralph L .Ketcham (8 v. to date, New York and London, 1959–) **5**: pp. 445–446.

[7] *Territorial Papers of the United States,* ed. Clarence E. Carter (26 v. to date, Washington, 1934–) **10**: p. 503. Further examples of this use of the word will be found in *ibid.* **11**: pp. 1136, 1217; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: pp. 140, 296, 305, 307, 321, 683; Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670–1732* (Ann Arbor, 1956), p. 209; and Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, 1925), p. 46.

[8] Quoted in Crane, p. 93.

[9] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 227.

[10] *The Writings of George Washington,* ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (39 v., Washington, 1931–1944) **1**: p. 464.

[11] Joseph Pritts, *Mirror of Olden Time Border Life* (2nd ed., Abingdon, Va., 1849), p. 487. For other examples of this usage, see Crane, pp. 209, 230, and Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *The Indian and the White Man* (New York, 1964), p. 241.

The bold frontiers they bravely stood,
To act for their King, and their country's good.[12]

The latest use of the word in this sense that I have found occurs in Colonel James Smith's 1799 narrative of his adventures: "the frontiers, (especially the Virginians,) had learned something of their [the Indians'] method of war." [13]

It seems to me that this new meaning was an outgrowth of the "barrier" sense of the term. The English colonies in America characteristically settled less favored groups, first friendly Indians and later poor or foreign immigrants, at points of contact with potentially dangerous Indians. For obvious reasons special privileges—cheap or even free land, transportation or supplies, tax benefits, etc.—were often necessary to induce such groups to settle in the desired locations. Once settled, they acted as a sort of human barrier for the older colonists. To illustrate, in 1722 George Clark, Secretary of the Colony of New York, addressed himself to Sir Robert Walpole on the subject of his colony's recent failure to persuade a group of German immigrants to settle there. He noted ruefully that "the greatest part of them have purchased in Pennsylvania, and are determined to go thither, thus the brigadier is baulked and this province deprived of a good frontier of hardy and laborious people." [14] It is a short logical step from a "frontier of . . . people" to calling the people themselves "frontiers." As the Indian threat waned, people did not have to be coaxed to the frontiers, and settlers in remote western districts ceased to be recognizable as a special class of people with a special function. As a result, by the end of the eighteenth century this new definition of "frontier" was a dead letter. It was soon forgotten, and evidently was not even noticed by any collector of Americanisms before Craigie.

Turner did not deal with this archaic Americanism or the two obsolete English meanings of the word we have noted. He did, however, discuss what he apparently thought had always been the main definition in England and Europe generally in modern times: "a fortified boundary line" or a "political boundary." Turner greatly oversimplified European usage, for frontiers had not always been boundary lines in modern Europe. Almost any European dictionary or thesaurus published before the nineteenth century, and many later ones, list "border," not "boundary," as the closest synonym for "frontier" (read equivalent terms for Romance languages). Until then both "frontier" and "border" ordinarily referred to peripheral areas, not lines of demarcation; the reverse was and has remained true for "boundary." Thus a later edition of the Englishman George Crabb's *English Synonymes,* evidently published around the middle of the nineteenth century, distinguishes these terms as follows:

Border, boundary, [and] *frontier* . . . are all applied to countries or tracts of land: the *border* is the outer edge or tract of land that runs along a country; . . . the *boundary* is that which bounds or limits, . . . the *frontier* is that which lies in the front or forms the entrance into a country, . . . It belongs to the science of geography to describe the *boundaries* of countries. The *frontiers* are mostly spoken of in relation to military matters . . . or in respect to one's passage from one country to another. . . .[15]

Another English lexicographer of that day was careful to point out that "while boundary may be an imaginary or geographical line, frontier is a slip of actual country." [16] Similar early statements on the meanings of the Romance language equivalents of "frontier" can readily be found. However accurate such observations were for European usage before about the middle of the nineteenth century, they were soon to become misleading. The linear "boundary" sense of "frontier" was gradually supplanting the areal "border" definition of the word, and became dominant by the second half of the nineteenth century. Turner overlooked this development. He would have been right about European frontiers only if he had confined his remarks to the Europe of his own day.[17]

[12] Quoted in Pritts, p. 432.

[13] Quoted in *ibid.,* p. 451. For similar examples, see: *ibid.,* p. 453; *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* **5**: p. 446; and *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: pp. 9, 234.

[14] Quoted in Jeptha R. Simms, *The Frontiersmen of New York* (2 v., Albany, 1882) **1**: p. 168.

[15] George Crabb, *English Synonymes* ("New edition," New York, 1887), pp. 159–160. Since several earlier editions of Crabb's work have not been available to me, I have been unable to determine exactly when the above was written. A similar but less vivid statement is found in the original 1816 edition.

[16] C. J. Smith, *Synonyms Discriminated* (New York, 1871), p. 116.

[17] The generalizations in this paragraph on European usage of "frontier" are based largely on an examination of English reference works, but in addition, on a selective study of French and Spanish dictionaries. Such works montonously cite the "border" and "boundary" definitions as the principal meanings of "frontier." More variation is evident in the special and less common definitions. For example, in Spanish "frontera" can mean an architectural façade, while the use of "frontier" to denote a frontier settler is a peculiarity of American English. The most helpful and authoritative reference works consulted in French were: Académie Française, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (8 eds. to date, Paris, 1694–1935),

Sir George Clark, in his chapter on European frontiers, has briefly set forth the main reasons why the word "frontier" in Europe gradually moved from its "border" to its "boundary" meaning. He notes that as far back as the seventeenth century "a frontier was ceasing to be an area and tending to become a line." [18] This trend, he explains, was a natural result of the rise of the state and statecraft. The new national bureaucracies demanded administrative tidiness, including sharply defined frontiers. Treaties became more important than battles in locating frontiers, especially after it became common to trade pieces of territory back and forth at conference tables. Two vaguely abutting frontier areas through agreement became one sharply defined frontier line (or "common frontier") represented on a map. This development proceeded surprisingly slowly. Clark could not find an example of a frontier line inscribed on a may earlier than 1718.[19] Steady progress in the unification of nation-states carried the process further. The various frontiers of a given country, now conceived to be a whole, were by the nineteenth century often seen as segments of a single national frontier. Previously, the word "frontier" most often had been employed in the plural; the singular form now became more common. In a related result, as frontiers were determined more and more over conference tables rather than on battlefields, the political connotations of the word gradually came to overshadow the military ones.

The main entry for "frontier" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* can, I believe, be read as a capsule history of English and European usage of the term in modern times. This definition, which is very similar to those found in the great dictionaries of other European languages, reads as follows: "[1] The part of a country which fronts or faces another country; [2] the marches; [3] the border or extremity coterminous with that of another." As I have indicated, properly interpreted this definition actually includes three meanings of "frontier" that are worth distinguishing from each other. The first part of the above definition describes the outer edge of a country, in other words, a border. Skipping to the third part of the definition, we note that it is somewhat ambiguous. The point to be recognized here is that an "extremity coterminous with that of another" and even a "border" (in recent usage) can mean a boundary line. This I take to be the third of these three related senses of "frontier." The second part of the definition, "the marches," indicates a meaning of the word that falls logically and perhaps chronologically between the other two. The same dictionary tells us that "march" can mean "a tract of debatable land separating one country from another," that is, an intermediate area or borderland.

The first of the three related senses of "frontier" that we have been considering (synonymous with "border") is an areal concept, and the territory referred to belongs to only one country or people. The third of the three (synonymous with "boundary") is a linear concept, and the line referred to is not the possession of one country or people, but of several. The second of these senses (synonymous with "borderland") is a transitional form: the "frontier" is still an area, not a line, but it is no longer conceived to be the exclusive possession of one country or people. Compared with the other two, this sense of "frontier" is rare and is seldom even mentioned in modern reference works. Probably it is to be found most often during the period when neither the "border" nor the "boundary" sense of "frontier" was strongly dominant, roughly the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Turner's characterization of European usage was misleading, but his description of what Americans meant by "frontier" was even more inaccurate. Clearly Turner oversimplified American usage when he failed to take note of the three obsolete definitions we have already examined. But his error became serious when he ignored the more modern definitions derived from Europe that have been used in America—the "border," borderland," and "boundary" meanings. He seemed to be saying that the important American meaning of "frontier," an outer margin of sparsely settled territory, had nearly always been dominant in America. He left this key point implicit, but even though others have stated it more explicitly heretofore no critic seems to have challenged the point. Later historians and even lexicographers have taken it for a fact that the American meaning of "frontier" has always or nearly always been common in America. This view is untenable. An

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and Émile Littre, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Éd. intégrale, Paris, 1956–1958), an historical dictionary. For Spanish, see: Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española* (18 eds. to date, Madrid, 1726–1956). There is nothing in Spanish to compare with Littre's dictionary, although a new historical dictionary is now in preparation under the auspices of the Spanish Academy.

[18] George Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1961), p. 143.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

examination of early American dictionaries and collections of synonyms will help demonstrate the accuracy of this assertion.

Relying principally on such reference works, Fulmer Mood some time ago wrote several informative articles on the history of the word "frontier" in America. Mood, one of Turner's many students and disciples, was not much concerned with determining the origin of the American definition, but his evidence well serves our purposes. In the first of his articles Mood traced the new American meaning back to General Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of the Ninth Census. He found the germ of the new meaning, or rather the new meaning in its statistical form, in Walker's *Statistical Atlas of the United States* (1874).[20] Then, in his second article, Mood made an ambitious survey of English and American reference works. As he discovered, early American dictionaries contained definitions of "frontier" that differed little if at all from English ones.[21] The first American dictionary that provided a definition in agreement with the way census officials and Turner used the word was the six-volume *Century Dictionary* (1889–1891). That definition reads: "That part of a country which forms the border of its settled or inhabited regions: as (before the settlement of the Pacific coast), the western *frontier* of the United States." Furthermore, Mood found that no dictionary of Americanisms prior to Craigie's *Dictionary of American English* noted any peculiar American meaning of the term. In what should have been a featured conclusion, he said: "It is clear . . . that no American dictionary thus far discussed [i.e., any prior to Craigie's] has defined the term in relation to density of population." [22]

Mention of a few reference works that Mood omitted ought to be made here. For rounding out the picture it helps to know that all of the many editions of *Roget's Thesaurus,* English and American, down to the International Edition of 1927 list two essential meanings of the word: "limit" (a linear concept) and "vicinity" (an areal concept). It is also revealing to learn that even after 1890 many American lexicographers seemed unaware of the existence of the new American meaning. By way of illustration, *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1894), *The American Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1896), and *The New National Dictionary, Encyclopaedia and Atlas* (1908) all gave standard European definitions. Furthermore, all of them quoted the passage by George Crabb that we have previously noticed as the most authoritative analysis of "frontier" and its synonyms. Allowing fully for the well-known tendency of dictionaries to lag behind usage, it remains clear that the American meaning of "frontier" was still quite new in Turner's day.

Not the new definition, but the old "border" sense of "frontier" was most common in America until the early years of the nineteenth century. In colonial and early national times, when Anglo-Americans spoke about frontiers, they usually were referring to the more or less fortified outer edges of the colonies, states, or nation. The main fact we must bear in mind about the situation of the English colonists and early Americans is that most of their peripheral settlements adjoined those of the Indians. Most of the colonies, many of the later states, and the United States itself had outer edges facing potentially hostile Indian territories. These are what Anglo-Americans ordinarily thought of as their "frontiers" or "borders." The latter word, being without military overtones, seems to have been seldom employed during the colonial period, when conflicts with Indians were chronic.[23] As Indian power dwindled during the nineteenth century, "border" became common.

A few examples of early American usage of "frontier" in its "border" sense are in order. In 1676 Governor William Berkeley of Virginia confidently reported to the English Secretary of State that "we have now such a strength on the frontiers of al our Plantations [colonies] that we cannot feare them [the Indians] if they were ten times more in number then [*sic*] they are." [24] George

[20] Fulmer Mood, "The Concept of the Frontier, 1871–1898," *Agricultural History* **19** (1945): pp. 24–30.

[21] The only early definition plausibly akin to Turner's that Mood could find was the one Noah Webester used in the first edition of his famous dictionary (1806). It reads: "A limit, boundary, border on another country, furthest settlements." Mood thought he saw Turner's definition foreshadowed in the expression "furthest settlements." It seems to me, however, that Webster probably intended the phrase to convey the "outpost" meaning of the word. Significantly, it was dropped from all of Webster's later dictionaries. This was precisely the period when the "outpost" definition was passing into disuse.

[22] Mood, "Notes on the History of the Word *Frontier*," *Ag. Hist.* **22** (1948): pp. 78–83.

[23] For the only four examples I have found, see: Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel* (Chapel Hill, 1957), pp. 38, 54; John C. Parish, *The Persistence of the Westward Movement and Other Essays* (Berkeley, 1943), p. 137; and Herbert L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (3 v., New York, 1904–1907) **1**: p. 564.

[24] Quoted in Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel,* p. 184.

Washington indicated that he had a similar conception of a frontier when in 1756 he wrote:

> I did, from the beginning, express my sentiments against having small garrisons in a chain of forts along our frontiers; . . . We [Virginians] have a frontier of such immense extent, that to build forts at convenient distances would employ such numbers of men or divide our troops into such trifling [numbers] that no one part could defend itself, much less the inhabitants, were the country invaded.[25]

In the same year Benjamin Franklin provided us with another example which shows that he too understood the word in this way:

> We have now near 1500 Men on our Frontier [i.e., of Pennsylvania], and yet People are sometimes scalp'd between Fort and Fort, and very near the Forts themselves. . . . Those Men, posted on the Frontier, are not the Militia, but what we call our *Provincial Troops,* being regularly enlisted to serve for a Term. . . .[26]

In the early national period naturally we begin to find the frontier-borders of the new nation mentioned. Thus Alexander Hamilton said this in a speech he delivered to the Constitutional Convention of 1787:

> Let us take a review of the variety of important objects, which must necessarily engage the attention of a national government. You have to protect your rights against Canada on the north, Spain on the south, and your western frontier against the savages. You have to adopt necessary plans for the settlement of your frontiers, and to institute the mode in which settlements and good government are to be made.[27]

Although such usage was growing obsolete by the middle of the nineteenth century, decades later some Americans still relied mainly on the "border" sense of the word.

We have introduced six definitions of "frontier" in this section, and analyzed and cited examples for four of them which were common in America before the nineteenth century. Three of these four (the "outpost," "barrier" and "border" definitions) were derived from Europe, while one ("frontier" meaning "frontier settler") originated in America. The two remaining definitions (the "borderland" and "boundary" senses of the term) belong to a later period and will be dealt with below. Each of the four meanings considered thus far carries military connotations. Significantly, when the word was used as an adjective in early America, it was ordinarily in expressions like "frontier defence," "frontier warfare," and "frontier discipline." Except in the "barrier" sense, when the word was used in any general way, it was usually in the plural. In such contexts, a generalization from numerous particulars (outposts, frontier settlers, or borders) obviously was intended. Before the ninteenth century American usage of "frontier" presents no important problems of analysis. Before then, as our examination of early American reference works and other source materials has shown, little innovation on the meaning of the term is apparent and hardly any vague or abstract usage is encountered. The Turner definition is not to be found. The above generalizations become less and less true as we move into the nineteenth century. American usage of "frontier," at least when the word was applied to the western part of the country, was evolving toward the Turner definition. Before attempting to trace and explain this evolution, it will be well to examine some common misconceptions about how early Americans viewed frontiers, western territories, and their relationship with the Indians.

III. EARLY AMERICAN VIEWS ON FRONTIERS AND WESTERN TERRITORIES

Historians in the Turnerian tradition have written at great length about American attitudes toward frontiers and the West. Despite the great achievements of Turner and many of those he inspired, the works of this school are misleading in several fundamental ways. For one thing, contrary to the Turnerian view until the late nineteenth century population had nothing to do with defining the location of a frontier in America.

Thus, on the one hand, a frontier could be completely uninhabited. In 1756 George Washington noted that "the frontiers [of Virginia], since this time a twelve month, are totally deserted for fifty miles and upwards quite from north to south."[28] Likewise, in 1821 Major Stephen Long reported on his exploration the year before of what came to be called the "Great American Desert." His evaluation of the agricultural possibilities of the area was most pessimistic, and he prophesied that scarcity of wood and water

> will prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country. . . .
>
> This region, however, viewed as a frontier, may prove of infinite importance to the United States, inasmuch as it is calculated to serve as a barrier to

[25] *The Writings of George Washington* **1**: p. 468.

[26] *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* **7**: p. 52.

[27] *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke (8 v. to date, New York and London, 1961–) **4**: p. 198.

[28] *The Writings of George Washington* **1**: p. 469. For a similar statement from the pen of Benjamin Franklin, see: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* **7**: pp. 129–130.

prevent too great an extension of our population westward, and secure us against the machinations or incursions of an enemy that might otherwise be disposed to annoy us in that part of our frontier.[29]

Similarly, when one of Cooper's characters in *The Pathfinder* (1840) journeys to an as yet unsettled shore of Lake Ontario, he has her exclaim: "We are very far from human habitations! . . . this is indeed being on a frontier." [30]

On the other hand, a frontier could be quite populous. This was most obviously true of the "Atlantic frontier." Thus in 1826 the Army Board of Engineers observed that "upon the Atlantic seaboard the Alleghanies crowd the people upon the coast and surround every alarm post of the frontier with a more and more dense population." [31] But here and there other populous frontier districts were to be found, especially on the northern frontier after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Shortly after that momentous event a Buffalo newspaper noted that "the Niagara frontier was literally alive with a floating population." [32] Similarly, in 1826 a board of high-ranking Army officers reported with satisfaction that the British to the north were no longer a serious danger to the nation:

> Our northern frontier comprises in first line the western counties of Vermont and northern regions of New York, from the neighborhood of Lake Champlain to that of Lake Erie, and in the second line the western district of Pennsylvania and State of Ohio, whose numerous, hardy, and rapidly increasing population will shortly be more than sufficient to repel any attack directed from Canada.[33]

Clearly then, population was still logically irrelevant to the position of a frontier in the United States. Frontiers were still determined by military and political considerations, as of old.

Turner and his followers devote a great deal of their attention to describing "the advance of the frontier." This phrase as customarily used assigns an important place in the language of expansion to the word "frontier" and implies that Americans until the later nineteenth century were characteristically oriented toward the West. These are retrospective notions. I have not encountered the phrase in question or similar ones in any earlier sources. Until at least the second third of the nineteenth century, when Americans talked about frontiers they habitually showed their preoccupation with defending them, not advancing them. Their great concern was to protect the "entrances" into their territories from attack. The Turnerian picture of the spatial orientation of early Anglo-Americans is demonstrably inaccurate. While the western frontiers of the various colonies were "fronts" in the military sense, as far as most people were concerned they were actually at the *back* of their territories. Until the Revolutionary era nearly all of the English colonists were oriented toward the sea and the native land they had left. They customarily described their relationship to England in familial terms and frequently referred to it as "Home." [34]

A statement by Sir William Johnson, who knew frontier conditions as few of his contemporaries, illustrates the general pattern of thought. In 1763 he anticipated the famous proclamation of that year by advocating that

> a certain line should be run at the back of the Northern Colonies, beyond which no settlement should be made, until the whole Six Nations [of Iroquois] should think proper of selling part thereof.[35]

As a result of this point of view, a whole battery of combination forms with "back" developed in America. The *Dictionary of Americanisms* lists more than two dozen of them, including "backwoods," "back frontier," "back country," and "back countryman." [36] In my opinion it was probably not until the period of explosive expansion following the War of 1812 that most Americans began to orient themselves primarily toward the west, although it must not be forgotten that this conceptual reversal was essentially an individual matter. Fulmer Mood noted an excellent, self-conscious, and rather early illustration of such a shift. In 1781 John Witherspoon, President of

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[29] Quoted in Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains* (3 v., London, 1823), **3**: p. 237.

[30] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pathfinder* (Modern Library ed., New York, 1952), p. 242; see also, *ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

[31] *American State Papers: Military Affairs* (7 v., Washington, 1832–1861) **3**: p. 294.

[32] Quoted in Robert W. Bingham, *The Cradle of the Queen City: A History of Buffalo to the Incorporation of the City,* Pub. Buffalo Hist. Soc. **31** (Buffalo, 1931): p. 420.

[33] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **3**: p. 443; see also *ibid.* **6**: pp. 366–67, 391; **7**: p. 969; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 65; and Thomas Low Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (New York, 1937), chap. 11.

[34] Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732–1775* (Columbia, S. C., 1953), pp. vii–viii.

[35] Quoted in Max Farrand, "The Indian Boundary Line," *American Historical Review* **10** (1905): p. 783.

[36] Many examples of such terms can be found in Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1953).

Princeton College, submitted a piece to the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser,* in which he directed his remarks to a previous contributor:

> As you appear to be sensible of the importance of a strict attention to grammatical propriety in speaking and writing, I am confident you will have no objections against being informed of any inaccuracies which may have escaped your own pen: I shall, therefore, take the liberty of pointing out a few. . . . "This (bringing the 'Indian tribes upon the back settlements') I call an act of extreme and unjustifiable barbarity, because their manner of making war is well known." . . . The settlements in America were begun to be made near the ocean, and were gradually advanced into the coutnry; for this reason I would prefer *frontier* to *back settlements:* nevertheless the settlements may be either the one or the other according to circumstances:—the following example will explain my meaning. A gentleman in London asked a printseller's clerk if Mr. Sayer was at home. The clerk replied "yes, Sir, he is backwards,"—*"backwards,* Sir, (said the gentleman) which way is that?" *"Straight forwards,* Sir," replied the clerk. This was literally true, for Mr. Sayer was then in the *back* part of the house, towards which the gentleman's *face* was turned. In like manner the settlements may be spoken of as being either *back* or *frontier,* according to circumstances: nevertheless, I would prefer the latter appellation. . . .[37]

It was not until 1890 that George Bancroft, looking back on his nearly sixty years of historical research, made this similar comment: "Whilst I have been engaged with these studies how the world has changed! Our own country looks out upon the west as well as upon the east. . . ." [38] Other nineteenth-century indicators of this gradual shift in orientation are the development of terms like "back East" and "back [i.e., New England] states," and at least one reference to "frontwoods" in the West.[39]

A brief examination of the word "interior" will clarify further the territorial outlook characteristic of Americans until the mid-nineteenth century. In the Turner tradition, modern accounts of colonial and early national history usually give the impression that, not only were everyone's eyes fixed on the sunset, but every westward step was viewed as a further advance into the interior of the country. Earlier Americans did not see it that way. To travel into the interior generally meant to move from near the frontier perimeter of one of the colonies, states, or the nation itself, inward toward its center. Thus if you were on a western frontier, you would have to go east to get to the interior, as a few examples will show. In 1756 the Pennsylvania Assembly reported that

> the Frontier of this Province is now in a better State of Defence than that of any other Colony on the Continent, . . . especially as we understand there are in the interior Counties many formed Companies, as yet unemployed, who are ready to enter into the Service, and march to the Frontier. . . .[40]

This point of view persisted well into the national period. In 1831 Withers wrote the following:

> The settlement thus made [near Wheeling] constituting a kind of advance *guard,* through which an Indian enemy would have to penetrate, before they could reach the interior. . . .
>
> Apprized of impending danger, many of the inhabitants on the frontiers of North Western Virginia, retired into the interior, before any depredations were committed. . . .[41]

A few years later Major General Edmund P. Gaines, in proposing construction of a vast railroad network, made this observation:

> With these railroads the States of Tennessee and Kentucky, with Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, (the last three of which will soon be, as the two first are, interior States, wholly separated from the frontier,) would be able on the approach of war to detach at one and the same time to each one of the above designated grand divisions of the national frontier, . . . an army of two hundred thousand men.[42]

As late as 1876 McKnight could say: "Those who located along the Ohio differed from those who selected lands in the interior. They were more ambitious of pushing themselves forward. . . ." [43] Logically complementing this use of "interior," we find numerous compounds with "out" applied to the frontier area—"out lands," "out settlements," "out garrisons," etc. Similarly, those who left the "interior" and headed "out west" were usually called "emigrants."

On the other hand, the Indian countries were considered to possess separate interiors. Thus, in 1816 Ninian Edwards, Governor of Illinois Territory, almost despaired of finding honest In-

[37] Quoted in Mood, "Notes on the History of the Word *Frontier," Ag. Hist.* **22** (1948): p. 79.

[38] Quoted in Russell B. Nye, *George Bancroft: Brahmin Rebel* (New York, 1944), p. 301.

[39] See, respectively, the *Dictionary of Americanisms,* q. v. "back," and the *Dictionary of American English,* q. v. "frontwoods."

[40] *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* **6**: p. 441.

[41] Alexander Scott Withers, *Chronicles of Border Warfare,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cincinnati, 1895), pp. 125, 150–151.

[42] "A Plan for the Defence of the Western Frontier, Furnished by Major General Gaines, February 28, 1838," U. S. Cong., *House Doc.,* 25th Cong., 2nd sess., 1838, ser. 329, no. 311, p. 43.

[43] Charles McKnight, *Our Western Border* (Philadelphia, 1876), p. 184.

dian agents, "for placed, as they must be, far in the interior of the Indian country, . . . nothing is more easy for them than to practice the greatest frauds without detection." [44]

The older meaning of "interior," however, was eventually supplanted by a continental one. This later usage probably became dominant in about 1849. That year saw not only the gold rush to newly acquired California, but a notable federal reorganization. The Department of the Interior was created, and control over Indian affairs passed from the War Department to it. In official eyes at least, the United States, coast to coast, Indian Country and all, now had one interior.

Early American attitudes toward the Indians and the Indian Countries are matters of fundamental concern for us. Turner was again heedless of previous American views when he said that the Indian Country near the white settlements could be regarded as part of the American frontier. Men who had participated in or witnessed American westward expansion before about 1870 would not have agreed. Before then, few Americans doubted that the various Indian peoples owned their original lands, and, moreover, owned them independent of any Anglo-American authority. Indian lands had always been theoretically distinct from the Anglo-American frontiers. We shall understand the situation of these frontiers better after looking briefly at the changing attitudes whites held toward the political status of the Indians and the Indian Countries.

In early colonial times, Indians were seen as members of particular political groups, each of which was all but completely independent; by the last years of the nineteenth century the surviving remnants of these groups had come to seem so much alike that few Americans could detect any political distinctions between them, and all were utterly dependent upon the federal government. In these two important respects a complete reversal in both fact and perception had occurred, but it was a gradual process of nearly three centuries. During the middle years of this evolution, particularly from about 1830 to 1870, official attitudes towards the Indians were vague and contradictory and there were frequent outbursts of frustration from prominent Americans who had tried to make some sense out of them. As late as 1873 the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs could complain of "the anomalous relation of the Indian tribes to the government, which requires that they be treated as sovereign powers and as wards at one and the same time." [45]

The first English colonists in America often had exaggerated notions about the political development of the Indians. For several decades in most of the colonies we hear much talk of Indian kingdoms, kings, princes, and even emperors. Within a few years, however, the various bodies of Indians adjoining the colonies were customarily referred to as "nations." Not until the early nineteenth century (about the time the nomadic Indians of the prairies and plains were encountered) were they generally called "tribes." This latter change in nomenclature reflects the fact that Indian groups were becoming viewed less and less as independent entities, but rather as *subdivisions* of an essentially homogeneous mass.

During most of the colonial period some of the more tractable Indians were expected to help defend the colonies from the attacks of others. As a result, a vital distinction was made between "allied" or "tributary," and "foreign" nations of Indians. Except for those few living on reservations within the colonies, all of the neighboring Indians lived in their own "territories" or "countries." England's territorial pretensions to the continent were not aimed at Indians, but were essentially preemptive claims directed at European competitors. From the beginning, official relations between whites and Indians were on a diplomatic footing, and within a few years almost every new territorial acquisition for the colonies was made by purchase of land from some body of Indians.[46]

In colonial and early national times the term "Indian Country" meant a territory which the Anglo-Americans recognized as belonging to an Indian "nation" by natural right, the so-called "Indian title." [47] Before looking at some examples, we should note that while "nation" and

[44] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 64. For similar illustrations, see: *ibid.*, p. 570, *Territorial Papers* **11**: p. 664, and U. S. Cong., *Senate Doc.*, 27th Cong., 3rd sess., 1843, ser. 413, no. 1, p. 418.

[45] Quoted in William Christie MacLeod, *The American Indian Frontier* (London, 1928), p. 537. For a number of similar statements, see *ibid.*, p. 439, and Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 1.

[46] MacLeod, chaps. 14–15; Marshall Harris, *Origin of the Land Tenure System in the United States* (Ames, Iowa, 1953), chaps. 4–5, 11. Neither of these accounts of the rationale behind early land purchases from the Indians is very satisfactory, but they are the best we now have.

[47] For the history of the term "Indian Country," see: Prucha, *American Indian Policy,* pp. 13, 31, 49, 133, 261–262; U. S. Solicitor for the Department of the Interior, *Federal Indian Law* (Washington, 1958), pp. 12–17.

"country" are synonymous today, formerly they were not so close in meaning. "Nation" referred more to a people than to a territory; the reverse was true of "country." But both words generally had both connotations. In 1724 Cadwallader Colden asserted that "the Traders of New-York may sell their Goods in the Indian Countries at half the Price the [French] People of Canada can." [48] In 1752 Governor James Glen of South Carolina interviewed eleven Upper Creek and about thirty Lower Creek emissaries, "and asked them what they came about and if they had been sent down by the Head Men of their respective Countries." [49] Later, James Adair made the interesting observation that the current deplorable state of Indian relations was

> the unavoidable result of ignorant and wicked clergymen settled as Missionaries on the frontiers: and of that pernicious practice of general [trading] licenses, by which crowds of disorderly people infest the Indian countries, corrupt their morals, and put their civilization out of the power of common means.[50]

It will be observed that in each of these early examples, the term is given in the plural, indicating each author's awareness of the separate political existence of the Indian groups he had in mind.

In the early national period we still find many general references to "Indian Countries" and particular ones such as the "Creek Country," the "Cherokee country," and the "Crow country." [51] A "talk" of special commissioners assigned to purchase Creek lands in 1824 contains a particularly interesting example: "This is not the first country which has been sold by its proprietors. The United States have lately bought Florida from Spain . . . [and] Lousiana from France. . . ." [52] Indians of the same nation were often called "countrymen." [53] A related term frequently was applied to whites living among the Indians. In 1827, for example, one George Stinson was described as "an Indian countryman, or a white man naturalized as a Muscogee." [54] Such terminology, however, was growing out of date.

After the American Revolution, the conception of a single unified Indian Country steadily gained ground. It developed largely as a result of the attempt after 1763 to draw one continuous boundary line between whites and Indians. Previously, each colony had fixed its own by way of Indian treaties. By this time little was heard of allied or foreign nations; an Indian was an Indian. The Proclamation of 1763 was inspired by growing concern over the seemingly irreconcilable separateness of the two peoples. Indians fully shared this vision, and were partly responsible for the drawing of the line. First Pontiac, and later Joseph Brant, Tecumseh, and others, attempted to weld the Indians facing the Anglo-Americans into large confederations. Such Indian leaders hoped to prevent any single tribe or disaffected group from selling its territorial birthright, and to eliminate debilitating contacts with the whites. After nearly all combatant Indians sided with the British during the Revolutionary War, Americans rapidly lost their ability to distinguish between the various bodies of Indians.

Although there was much initial sentiment in the new nation for dealing harshly with all Indians as conquered enemies, the imperial policy of 1763 was soon adopted. On the one hand, Indian tribes were to be dealt with diplomatically and separately, treaties being ratified (after the adoption of the federal constitution) by the United States Senate. On the other hand, a clear line of demarcation was to separate Indians and whites. Treaties after 1785 pieced together a new line, codified in the Indian Intercourse Act of 1796. With new treaties and legislative acts, the boundary line gradually skipped westward. Thus the western frontier of the United States did not flow westward smoothly. Rather, segments of it moved in fits and starts, and even underwent occasional reversals. The important fact, however, is that this political boundary existed, at least on paper, down to the Civil War.[55]

[48] Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* (2 v., New York, 1902) **2**: p. 47.

[49] South Carolina (Colony), *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs: May 21, 1750–August 7, 1754,* ed. William L. McDowell, Jr. (Columbia, S. C., 1958), p. 210.

[50] James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London, 1775), p. 410.

[51] See, for example, *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: pp. 70, 86, 146, 153–154, 162, 483, 575, 709; Pritts, p. 35; and George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (2 v., Philadelphia, 1857) **1**: pp. 46, 112, 204, 226.

[52] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 570.

[53] For examples, see: *ibid.,* pp. 97, 125, 793; Pritts, p. 55; and William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram,* ed. Francis Harper (New Haven, 1958), p. 22.

[54] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 793. For similar illustrations, see: *ibid.,* pp. 79, 821, 823, 824, 849; *Territorial Papers* **21**: pp. 222, 382, 891; and Thomas S. Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1939), p. 49.

[55] Francis Paul Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet: the Role of the United States Army in the Development of the Northwest, 1815–1860* (Madison, 1953), p. 57. See also,

"Indian Country" thus came to mean all Indian lands beyond the boundary but still within the territorial limits claimed by the United States. In the quaint phraseology of the day, it was essentially that land whose "Indian title" had not yet been "extinguished." The Indian Intercourse Act of 1790 provides us with what was perhaps the first written example of the term in this broader sense:

> every person who shall attempt to trade with the Indian tribes, or be found in the Indian country . . . without a license first had and obtained. . . . and being thereof convicted in any court proper to try the same, shall forfeit all the merchandise . . . so found in the Indian country. . . .[56]

For an 1822 instance, we have this statement from John Heckewelder:

> The result of my inquiries among those Indians I had met with was to this effect: that no surveying business could at this present time be done in the Indian country; that orders had been given by the chiefs of the warlike nations that every white man seen with chain and compass on their lands should be considered as an enemy. . . .[57]

As a final example, I quote this 1833 report of Captain John Stuart:

> I have now been here [in the Arkansas Territory] a Little more than one Month, And have made it my particular Duty, to prevent so far as practicable the Introduction of Ardent Spirits, into the Indian Country. . . . although it be prevented from passing up the river, It can and will, be Introduced by means of Waggons Pack horses &ct., along the numerous by roads and Paths which cross the Line into the Indian Country. . . .[58]

There were later changes in the legal meaning of the term, until by the late nineteenth century it meant merely reservation land still in the hands of its original inhabitants, but the definition I have given is precise enough for present purposes.

Even this homogenized Indian Country was not devoid of political significance in the eyes of Americans. It was a sort of protectorate, represented internationally by the government of the United States. Surprisingly enough, there was recurrent discussion of the possibility of creating an Indian state from all or part of it.[59] Equally interesting is the fact that passports were legally mandatory for all citizens of the United States who traveled into the Indian Country until 1834, after which time only foreigners were required to procure them.[60]

Congress did not act to restrict the issuance of passports to the federal government until 1856.[61] As a result, most passports for travel through the Indian Country were issued by state governors (as was the case for foreign travel) or military commanders.[62] Nevertheless, a few of them evidently were issued by the Secretary of State of the United States.[63] There was a degree of reciprocity in passport policy, for agency Indians were sometimes obliged to secure passes from their agents before they would be allowed to enter the white settlements, and chiefs from distant tribes were sometimes issued passports to make the long journey to Washington.[64]

There was one more quasi-political feature of the Indian Country, and, in the earlier sense, of the Indian Countries, which will help us apply the dictionary definitions we have encountered to the American situation. They had frontiers. Speaking of the great Indian leader, Strachey in about 1615 noted that "the inhabitants themselves, especially his frontier neighbour prince, call him still Powhatan."[65] Likewise, a West Indian source of 1648 says: "After the two daies we drew neer unto the Heathens Frontiers."[66] For my next example, I must skip to a 1792 report of Creek agent James Seagrove:

> I find the Creeks have been killing some white people on their Western frontier. In my talks with the Indians, I am led to believe that the people killed, belong to a settlement south of Cumberland river, and on lands that never have been sold, or ceded by the Indians. . . .[67]

Prucha, *American Indian Policy,* pp. 13–20, 32–34, 45, 49, 261–262.

[56] United States, *Statutes at Large* **1**: pp. 137–138.

[57] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 388.

[58] *Territorial Papers* **21**: p. 710.

[59] Annie H. Abel, "Proposals for an Indian State, 1778–1878," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1907* (2 v., Washington, 1908) **1**: pp. 89–102.

[60] Prucha, *American Indian Policy,* pp. 254, 263; *Federal Indian Law,* pp. 14n, 151; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 14.

[61] U. S. Dept. of State, *The American Passport* (Washington, 1898), p. 36.

[62] Mary G. Bryan, *Passports Issued by Governors of Georgia, 1785 to 1809* (Washington, 1959); Prucha, *American Indian Policy,* pp. 78, 154, 204; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 63. For a colonial precedent, see: South Carolina, *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs,* p. 169.

[63] *Territorial Papers* **17**: pp. 661, 670, 671; *The American Passport,* p. 10

[64] *Territorial Papers* **9**: pp. 515–516; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 690.

[65] William Strachey, *The Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia* (London, 1849), p. 48.

[66] Quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* q. v. "frontier."

[67] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 296.

Another illustration derives from high-level discussions after 1825 on the advisability of removing eastern Indians and establishing a "Permanent Indian Frontier" along the ninety-fifth meridian.[68] A later instance is found in John Ross Browne's *Adventures in the Apache Country* (1867): "A few hundred yards from the well is an adobe fort built by the Papago Indians as a protection to their frontier village and grazing range." [69] My final and most vivid example is a statement by Congressman Richard M. Johnson included in an 1836 report of the House Committee on Military Affairs:

> Bordering, as we do, upon an Indian frontier so extensive, and having so often felt the effects of their sudden impulses in bursts of the most cruel passions, the committee regard it alike the dictate of humanity and of sound policy to present to their view such an aspect of strength as will tend at once to restrain their savage ferocity and to supersede the painful necessity of retaliation.[70]

The foregoing illustrations provide the missing logical link for understanding how Americans could use the word "frontier" in its traditional "border" sense as long as they did. Until about the mid-nineteenth century most Americans would have agreed that the United States, like the English colonies before it, did not border on emptyness in the West. Rather, like European nations, it bordered on other countries—Indian Countries. Schematically, the frontiers of the United States and its various western subdivisions abutted the frontiers of the Indian Country and its various eastern subdivisions. Curiously enough, displacement and the allurements of civilization often led to a relatively high concentration of a relatively civilized (if demoralized) population on the Indian frontiers, quite the reverse of the usual situation on the Anglo-American frontiers.

IV. THE NATIONAL FRONTIER

In the next stages in the evolution of the meaning of "frontier," American usage continued to follow that of Europe, although apparently it lagged somewhat behind. Only since the Revolution, after all, had Americans been able to talk about a national frontier. Before the nineteenth century was far advanced Americans, like Europeans before them, would more often conceive of the national frontier as a boundary line than as a border area. Naturally this was also true for the territorial subdivisions of the United States which had frontiers adjoining those of foreign peoples—states, territories, counties, etc.—but these need not concern us here.

It will be well to begin this discussion of the frontier of the United States by showing that the western frontiers with the Indians were not altogether *sui generis,* but were customarily regarded as portions of the national frontier. Because of the baffling legal status of the Indian Country, the United States' frontiers with Indians were not quite on a par with its frontiers with European nations. For some purposes the Indian Country was a foreign, for some purposes (chiefly dealings with European powers) a domestic territory. It was as foreign territory that the Indian Country (or in the earlier sense, the various Indian Countries) had frontiers with the United States.

For our first example showing that the national frontier did border on Indian territories, let us look at a statement President Washington made in 1790: "The treaty with the Creeks may be regarded as the main foundation of the future peace and prosperity of the southwestern frontier of the United States. . . ."[71] Similarly, a report of the Senate Committee on the Public Lands in 1817 noted that

> Several settlements, distant from the mass of population, and detached from each other, were embraced by the boundaries of the United States as established by the treaty of 1783. . . . The acquisition of Louisiana by the treaty of 1803 has still more increased the irregularity of the frontier boundary, . . .
>
> The present irregular form of the frontier, deeply indented by tracts of Indian territory, presents an extended boundary on which intercourse is maintained between the citizen and the savage. . . .[72]

Again, in 1825 Thomas Hart Benton assured his fellow Congressmen that measures had been taken which would "give to the future State of Arkansas that power and magnitude, to which, as a frontier State, in relation both to a foreign nation [Mexico] and numerous Indian tribes, it will be justly entitled." [73] To cite but one more example, in the same year Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory expressed his dissatisfaction with the military preparations in his area as follows:

[68] Ray A. Billington, *Westward Expansion* (New York, 1949), pp. 468–471.

[69] Quoted in the *Dictionary of American English,* q. v. "frontier."

[70] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **6**: p. 149; see also, *ibid.,* p. 162.

[71] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 83.

[72] *Ibid.* **2**: p. 124.

[73] *Ibid.,* p. 557.

I consider this frontier the weakest and most exposed in the Union. . . .

The British are in juxtaposition with the frontier of the United States below this strait [Mackinac], and the Indians above it, . . . if there be no force stationed upon the boundaries of their [the Indians'] Country, nor in its interior, there is nothing to produce an effect upon them.[74]

There were of course many ways to subdivide the national frontier. As an instance, in 1838 Major General Edmund P. Gaines submitted a lengthy "Plan for the Defence of the Western Frontier" to Congress. In one place Gaines speaks of "our Atlantic, Northern, Southern, or Mexican frontiers," but he had an even more detailed conception. He saw "six grand divisions of the national frontier," namely the northern, eastern, southern, and three subdivisions of the western frontier. Of the "southern section of the Western frontier," he says: "This is by far the most vital and important section of the whole inland frontier of the United States; because it is threatened by the most powerful savage nations. . . ." [75]

Another kind of subdivision of the national frontier is evident from this statement found in an 1826 report of the Army Engineers:

In the report we have taken no account of the interior and land frontiers of the Union; they have not yet been sufficiently reconnoitred to enable us to give an exact idea of the system of defensive works they may require.[76]

The "land frontiers of the Union" clearly are those with Canada, Mexico, and the western Indians. "Interior frontiers" seem to be those with Indian Countries enclosed within the "interior" of the United States. The term "interior frontier" is understandably rare. The Indians in question here, notably the Creeks and Cherokees, were only enveloped in the eighteen-twenties, and about a decade later they were removed to a new Indian territory beyond the Mississippi. Unlike the situation of modern Italy or South Africa, the "interior frontiers" of the United States were temporary phenomena. With great relief, the Senate Committee for Indian Affairs in 1836 asserted that "they are on the outside of us, and in a place which will ever remain on the outside." [77]

Thus in the early nineteenth century the national frontier of the United States was still seen in familiar European ways. It was composed of land frontiers, and on the coasts, maritime frontiers.[78] The nation's land frontiers might be subdivided into its frontiers with European nations (including Mexico), and into a special category—frontiers with Indians. The latter might occasionally be subdivided further into the ordinary frontiers on the periphery of the nation, and the few "interior" frontiers. Until perhaps 1830 the national frontier and all of its component parts were still most often regarded as border areas.

Let us now look at a few references to the frontiers of foreign countries adjoining the United States. In 1819 Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, in a communication to the House of Representatives, wrote: "It is believed that, within our limits, along the range of the Rocky Mountains, quite to the Mexican frontier is the best region for fur and peltries on this continent." [79] A few years later, in 1836, Colonel Joseph G. Totten observed that Lake Champlain would serve "as the best possible military line of communication in case the United States should assume offensive operations against the weakest point of the Canadian frontier." [80] But look more closely at these two contrasting examples, from 1836 and 1837, respectively:

It was a scheme of those interested in the Texan speculations, . . . [to induce] the authorities of the United States to lend their aid in raising in this city a force composed of interested persons, which force should move to [the outskirts of] the Texan frontiers . . . and afterwards, under false pretensions, actually march into Texas and take part in the war. . . .

Mr. Forsyth returned . . . the instructions of the War Department to the officer commanding on the Texas Frontier.[81]

It will be noted that the first of this pair of examples refers to the frontiers of Texas, still an

[74] *Territorial Papers* **11**: p. 664. For similar illustrations, see: *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: pp. 113, 254, 543; **2**: pp. 123, 181, 184, 315; *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **3**: pp. 330, 829; **6**: pp. 149, 416, 418, 420; **7**: pp. 157, 777.

[75] U. S. Cong., *House Doc.*, 25th Cong., 2nd sess., 1838, ser. 329, no. 311, pp. 5, 17, 42.

[76] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **3**: p. 298.

[77] Quoted in MacLeod p. 466. The term may possibly have been revived after the Mexican War to describe the Indian Country between the Midwest and the Pacific settlements, but I have not located any examples.

[78] For references to the maritime frontiers of the United States, see: *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 414; *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **3** pp. 283–298, 829; **6**: pp. 149, 367, 424; **7**: p. 905; and James D. Richardson, ed., *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (11 v., New York, 1908) **2**: p. 832.

[79] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 184.

[80] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **6**: p. 390.

[81] Quoted, respectively, in *ibid.*, p. 424, and the *Dictionary of American English*, q. v. "frontier."

independent nation, while the second refers to the United States' frontier bordering on Texas. When a phrase like "Texas frontier" could be used to designate territory on either side of a boundary, context was all-important in establishing the intended meaning. This often ambiguous usage was becoming common and reflects, I think, the fact that frontiers were being viewed less and less as the exclusive property of *one* of the peoples in a confrontation situation. Increasingly the frontier line, rather than the areas on either side of it, became the focus of attention. In other words, we are seeing American usage following that of Europe. After about 1830 "frontier" more often than not meant a boundary line.

The term "Indian frontier" underwent a similar development. In later years it often meant an American frontier with the Indians, and by the second third of the nineteenth century this was the usual meaning of the term. For example, in 1791 William Bartram noted that he had traveled "through uninhabited wildernesses, and an Indian frontier," meaning the western verge of Georgia.[82] In 1821 General Andrew Jackson related that "on my return from the Creek frontier last summer, and passing through the lower part of the Cherokee country, I found great dissatisfaction prevailed." [83] Orders from the Adjutant General's Office in 1832 contain another illustration: "It is . . . ordered that officers commanding on the Indian frontiers or in the Indian country . . . lend their aid in furthering the views and intentions of the Indian Agents. . . ." [84] A final example will show how this term too finally came to mean a boundary line. In 1857 Secretary of War John B. Floyd noted the existence of several "line[s] of Indian frontier." [85]

Another indicator of the trend from the "border" to the "boundary" definition at this time is the appearance of the logically intermediate "borderland" definition. This meaning of "frontier" is extremely rare in America. I have found only four clear examples of this usage, all of them occurring around 1830. For the first illustration, Cooper began his *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) by drawing this grim picture of colonial America:

> A wide and, apparently, an impervious boundary of forests, severed the possessions of the hostile provinces of France and England. . . . There was no recess of the woods so dark, nor any secret place so lonely, that it might claim exemption from the inroads of those who had pledged their blood to satiate their vengence, or to uphold the cold and selfish policy of the distant monarchs of Europe.
>
> Perhaps no district, throughout the wide extent of the intermediate frontiers, can furnish a livelier picture of the cruelty and fierceness of the savage warfare of those periods, than the country which lies between the head waters of the Hudson and the adjacent lakes.[86]

Similarly, in his annual message to Congress in 1830, President Jackson said:

> There was reason to fear in the course of the last summer that the harmony of our relations [with Mexico] might be disturbed by the acts of certain claimants, under Mexican grants, of territory which had hitherto been under our jurisdiction. The cooperation of the representative of Mexico near this Government was asked on the occasion and was readily afforded. Instructions and advice have been given to the governor of Arkansas and the officers in command in the adjoining Mexican State by which it is hoped the quiet of that frontier will be preserved until a final settlement of the dividing line shall have removed all ground of controversy.[87]

Again, in 1832 citizens of Florida Territory sent a memorial to Congress in which they stated that

> The wildness & unsettled character of the frontier, (being in extent more than three hundred miles) between the whites and Indians, afford much ample facility for them [the Indians] to indulge their national disposition to wander, . . . it will be next to impossible to confine them within their own Territorial limits: . . . .[88]

Given the proverbial vagueness of many parts of the early national frontier, it is at first surprising that this "borderland" definition of "frontier" was so seldom employed. We must remember, however, that, although there were many disputed areas on the periphery of the United States before the Civil War, by European standards few of them long remained so. They simply had too little time to acquire a well-recognized status like that of the Scotch Borderlands. Then too, there were other ways to communicate the idea of intermediateness when talking about frontiers; phrases like "on the frontier(s)" had long served this purpose.

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[82] Bartram, p. 30.

[83] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 503.

[84] Quoted in Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet*, p. 94n.

[85] U. S. Cong., *Senate Exec. Doc.*, 35th Cong., 1 sess., 1857, ser. 920, no. 11, p. 3. See below, p. 24.

[86] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (3 v., London, 1826) **1**: pp. 1–2.

[87] Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents* **2**: p. 1070.

[88] *Territorial Papers* **24**: p. 679. The fourth example, dated 1830, is quoted in Richard Schifter, "Indian Title to Land," *American Indian* **7**: (1954): pp. 37–38.

As Americans increasingly used "frontier" in the "boundary" sense they often employed the word in compound forms, evidently to make certain that their use of the newer, linear definition was not misunderstood. "Extreme frontier" was one such phrase, and the word "line" itself was often apposed to "frontier." In 1793, for example, Governor William Blount of the Southwestern Territory wrote the following:

> The settlements of Mero district extend up and down the Cumberland river, from east to west, about eighty-five miles, and the extreme width, from north to south, does not exceed twenty-five miles, . . . This district has an extreme frontier [i.e., circumference] of at least two hundred miles.[89]

The word soon ceased to need qualification to be understood in the linear sense, as some further illustrations will show.

As a wartime measure, Congress early in 1815 enacted a law which provided

> That no citizen or person usually residing within the United States, shall be permitted to cross the frontier into any of the provinces or territory belonging to the enemy, or of which he may be possessed, without a passport. . . .[90]

George Catlin, in a letter evidently written in the late 1830's, penned this striking passage:

> Having finished my travels in the "Far West" for awhile, and being detained a little time, *sans occupation,* in my nineteenth or twentieth transit of what in common parlance is denominated the Frontier; I have seated myself down to give some further account of it, . . .
>
> The Frontier may properly be denominated the fleeting and unsettled line extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Lake of the Woods, a distance of three thousand miles; which indefinitely separates civilized from Indian population. . . .[91]

It is particularly significant that Catlin notes that a linear meaning of the term was now "common parlance." A few years earlier he had often used the "border" definition or, when he meant the boundary line, employed compound forms.[92] Also interesting is the fact that this is an early instance of viewing the frontier confrontation in a cultural, rather than a military or political light. The annual report for 1857 of Secretary of War John B. Floyd provides another illustration in the more common pattern:

> The external boundary of our country, requiring throughout a more or less vigilant military supervision, is 11,000 miles in length, presenting every variety of climate and temperature, from the inclement cold of our Canada frontier to the tropical regions of southern Texas. But the occupation of this long line of frontier is a trifling difficulty in comparison with that of protecting the double line of Indian frontier, extending from the Lake to the Woods to the banks of the Rio Grande, on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, and from beyond the river Oregon on the British frontier to the head of the Gulf of California, on the western slope of those mountains.[93]

For a final example, in 1876 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs made this statement:

> A zigzag, ever-varying line, more or less definitely marked, extending from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and always slowly moving west, has been known as the "frontier" or "border." Along this border has been an almost incessant struggle, the Indians to retain and the whites to get possession; . . . Peace would continue until . . . the pressure of emigration would again break over the border, and the Indian by force or treaty, be compelled to surrender another portion of his cherished hunting grounds.[94]

Thus in the early nineteenth century, the word "frontier" was used almost exclusively in two of its traditional European senses—the outer edge of a territory up to and including a line of demarcation, or later, simply the line itself. Since, as we shall see, the peculiar American situation was responsible for logical difficulties with both the "border" and the "boundary" definitions, further evolution of the word's meaning was inevitable.

V. AMERICAN CIRCUMSTANCE COMPELS REDEFINITION

As the nineteenth century advanced, two basic questions about the western frontier of the United States became more and more difficult to answer in the old familiar ways, in fact, they often defied any unambiguous answers at all. These questions were: (1) "What lies beyond the frontier line?" and (2) "Where exactly is it?" The distinctively

[89] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* 1: p. 433. For a similar example, see *ibid.*, p. 474.

[90] United States, *Statutes at Large* 3: pp. 199–200.

[91] Catlin, 2: pp. 728–729.

[92] *Ibid.* 1: pp. 37, 106–107, 205; 2: pp. 403, 423, 453. Once Catlin even seems to have employed the "borderland" definition—when he wrote of the Indians "who inhabit the frontier." *Ibid.* 1: p. 26.

[93] U. S. Cong., *Senate Exec. Doc.,* 35th Cong., 1 sess., 1857, ser. 920, no. 11, p. 3.

[94] Quoted in Roy M. Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage* (Princeton, 1942), pp. 227–228. With the "boundary" definition becoming dominant in the mid-nineteenth century, it was the "border" meaning that sometimes required qualification or special emphasis for clarity. Thus in 1837 Indian Agent John Dougherty spoke of the "frontier border" of Missouri. *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* 7: p. 963.

American meaning of "frontier" was to develop out of the confusion.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century the first of these hypothetical questions would have been answered "Indian Country"; in the last, very likely "free land." In the meantime the Indian Country had for practical purposes disappeared. Briefly, it happened in the following way. The Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 extended federal criminal law into the Indian Country by annexing it, for this one purpose, to federal judicial districts. The acquisition and settlement of California and Oregon squeezed it as in a vice between two white sections of the United States. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 cut a huge central corridor through it out to the new Pacific territories. The Revised Statutes of 1873 omitted the portion of the 1834 act which had defined the Indian Country, thus apparently ending its legal existence. Subsequently, the federal courts decided that those few reservation lands still held by their original owners under their original natural rights title remained "Indian Country." During this centuiry, federal agents had bought up most of the trans-Mississippi West from the Indians. The latter were resettled on reservations, having thus exchanged their lands held by natural right for others held at the suffrance of the federal government. With the Indian Country fading out of the picture and the cessation of treaty-making with Indian tribes after 1871, it became increasingly difficult to think of the western frontier in the old ways. In 1880 George Booth had to exercise his imagination in what was evidently an effort to do so. He began an essay by asking: "what do we mean by the frontier?" and then answered:

> It does not bring to mind those prosperous colonies [in the West], whose lands surveyed, secured by good legal titles, and freed from danger of savage inroads have a permanent population busily engaged in founding homes. It takes us rather to the boundaries of the Indian reservations, along which scattered camps and settlements of white men are fringed; to lands which, though legally open for settlement, are constantly menaced by Indians; . . . .[95]

This was merely a bit of nostalgia, and few Americans would have agreed with Booth on the location of the frontier.

It was not only in the political sphere that Indians were becoming negligible in the eyes of white Americans. The same was true regarding military matters. Once the Indians could threaten the very existence of Anglo-American communities; later they could at least terrorize the whole frontier area. But finally they became a mere nuisance to be dealt with routinely by professional military patrols. In the cultural sphere, early romantic notions of "noble savages" all but disappeared. In the latter half of the nineteenth century "savagery" was no longer seen so much as a stage of society, but as the implacable foe of progress and civilization.[96] Thus, as the century advanced, the Indians were becoming politically, militarily, and culturally beneath the notice of white Americans. They had gone from quasi-independent political powers to wards, from military powers to renegades, and from members of different though inferior cultures to a people congenitally hostile to culture.

The second logical dilemma requires more extensive treatment. During the colonial period the whites had generally settled right up to the Indian boundary, and there built forts for their protection. Looking at this rough picture in another way, the political boundary line, the line of military defense, and the line of white population were essentially coincident. One reason why the query "Where exactly is the line?" became more and more perplexing is quite obvious. The Indian boundary line was often badly or not at all marked, especially beyond the Mississippi. You could not blaze a line of trees on the prairie. Furthermore, contemporary accounts abound with evidence of the growing hatred Indians focused on surveyors and even their instruments—"land stealers," the Cherokees called the latter. But even more basic in befogging the meaning of "frontier" was the fact that soon after the Revolution these three lines began to diverge, and they got progressively farther apart.

The extension of the line of military forts into the Indian Country is the earliest visible evidence of this divergence. In one of his first reports to President Washington, Secretary of War Henry Knox in 1789 observed that

> The angry passions of the frontier Indians and whites, are too easily inflamed by reciprocal injuries, and are too violent to be controlled by the feeble authority of the civil power. . . . [Each of] the boundaries between the whites and Indians must be protected by a body of at least five hundred troops.
>
> The post which they should occupy should be without the limits or jurisdiction of any individual State,

[95] George Booth, "Frontier Folk," *International Review* 9 (1880): p. 29.

[96] Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America* (rev. ed. Baltimore, 1965).

and within the territory assigned to the Indians, for which particular provision should be made in the treaties.[97]

Indians were readily persuaded of the advantages, both trade and defensive, of such forts, which were steadily advanced into the Indian Country. Secretary of War Calhoun was particularly active in pushing this "exterior cordon" forward, but most Secretaries followed the same policy.[98] In 1828, however, Secretary of War Peter B. Porter disagreed:

> The policy of pushing our military posts . . . so far within the Indian country, and so far ahead of the regular advance of our population, may well be questioned. Instead of protecting our frontier inhabitants against the incursions of the Indians . . . they only serve to invite wild and profligate adventurers into the Indian Country. . . .[99]

But such dissent was unusual, for these remote forts unquestionably were effective in discouraging Indian violence.

Comments of Quartermaster General Trueman Cross in 1837 will help illuminate the peculiar new situation. In his report of that year "on the defense of the western frontier," he said:

> The western frontier may be deemed to comprehend the region lying between Red river to the south and the Upper Mississippi to the north. In a military sense, the left flank of this extended line now rests on Fort Towson, . . . and the right upon Fort Snelling, . . . The intermediate positions are Fort Gibson . . . and Fort Leavenworth, . . . The three first named, being at the head of navigation, can scarcely ever be advanced, and will therefore, it is believed, continue to form a part of what may be termed our *exterior* line of defence. . . .
>
> By the exterior line, I mean that which may be called for by great military and national considerations, and which must often be advanced into the Indian country far *beyond* our boundary; and by the interior line, that which is required for the special protection of the settlements, and which, in order to effect its object, must necessarily be *within* our boundary. It occurs to me that, under existing circumstances, no plan for the protection of the western frontier can be effectual which looks to a single line of defence to accomplish objects so different in their character, ...[100]

While not much of a prophet, Cross was quite perceptive and clearly appreciated the divergence which had taken place.

Cross' statement that an interior line of defense would have to be located east of the Indian-white political boundary is particularly interesting. He recognized that the line of white settlement was lagging behind the boundary line. Speaking of the Old Northwest after about 1815, one authority describes the situation this way:

> Settlers did not arrive so fast as the Indian country was vacated. . . . The extinguishment of Indian titles became in truth almost a mania in the Northwest and that even before Madison's term had expired. [Secretary of War William H.] Crawford was indignant and restrained as best he could an extinguishment that went too far in advance of settlement.[101]

And so it went, all the way out to the Rockies. The federal land system, as it gradually lumbered into motion, also acted to keep white settlers back from the boundary. A time-consuming rectangular land survey oriented by "base lines" and "principal meridians" theoretically preceded any settlement in a new area. Unlike the colonial practice of surveying only discrete pieces of territory on the fringes of settlement, this complicated new procedure required surveyors to go far in advance of settlement and then (in the two eastern quadrants) to work back toward it.[102] The occasional experiments in the early nineteenth century with "neutral" strips to separate the two populations operated in much the same way.

Since these three lines diverged, which one did Americans regard as bounding the western frontier of the United States? The answer is that at one time or another all three of them were seen as marking the frontier. The political line seems to have ordinarily served this function in the early days of the nation. By the 1830's, roughly the period after the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834, the limits of the western frontier were more often designated by the military line. Finally, after the Civil War, with the other lines ambiguous or irrelevant, the line of settlement was most commonly seen as bounding the western frontier. A few examples of each sort of usage are in order.

In 1796 special United States commissioners held a talk with the chiefs of the Creek nation, the boundary being on the agenda. After listening to an address from the chiefs,

[97] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 53. A few years later Knox outlined in greater detail his recommendation that "a line of military posts, at such distance as shall be directed, be established on the frontiers, within the Indian boundary." *Ibid.*, p. 544.

[98] Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet*, pp. 21–22.

[99] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **4**: p. 2.

[100] *Ibid.* **7**: p. 782.

[101] Annie H. Abel, "The History of Events Resulting in Indian Consolidation West of the Mississippi River," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1906* (2 v., Washington, 1908) **1**: p. 277.

[102] William D. Pattison, *Beginnings of the American Rectangular Land Survey System, 1784–1800* (Chicago, 1957).

The commissioners . . . then entered fully into the subject; stated the length of the line on the frontiers, as detailed in the first section of the act explained to the Indians. That blood had been spilt by bad people on both sides, the whole length of it.[103]

Similarly, in 1827 surveyor Wiley Williams informed Governor Troup of Georgia that he had encountered Indian hostility while

surveying the land on the west side of the new treaty line. . . . if the survey proceeds, a protection must be afforded us, and that must be sufficient to protect the whole frontier line, from the intersection of the Cherokee line with the State line, to Miller's bend.[104]

In 1834 the House Committee on Military Affairs held it to be "bad policy to have an armed force stationed so remote from the frontier [of Arkansas Territory], and in the midst of an Indian Country. . . . the present western boundary line is fixed by treaty." [105] For a final illustration, in 1837 Army Engineer Charles Gratiot delineated "the western frontier of the United States" as follows:

Beginning at the mouth of the Sabine river, on the Gulf of Mexico, and running up said river to its intersection with the meridional territorial line; thence along this line by Texas to its junction with the Red river; thence along the western boundary of Arkansas and Missouri to the mouth of the Kansas; thence up the Missouri river to its union with the north boundary of the State of Missouri; and thence following the external line of the territory over which the Indian title has been extinguished to Lake Superior. . . .[106]

But since more and more troops, traders, and squatters were crossing over into the Indian Country, and Indians were withdrawing beyond the army posts, the political boundary line lost much of its early significance.

As the exterior military line came more and more to represent the actual locus of confrontation between Indians and whites, it supplanted the political boundary as the outer limit of the frontier. Thus in 1836 Congressman Richard M. Johnson maintained that in order to prevent Indian depredations

there must be a military force within their observation; . . . the committee [on Military Affairs] do not see any plan so economical, and at the same time so effectual, as that . . . suggested by the War Department, viz: by a military road [within the Indian Country], and strong posts and deposits upon it, . . . A line of posts marking that frontier, and facilities of communication between them by a continuous military road, may be accomplished at an inconsiderable expense. . . .[107]

At about the same time, George Catlin noted that Fort Leavenworth was "the extreme outpost on the Western Frontier, and built, like several others, in the heart of the Indian country." [108] Similarly, Quartermaster General Trueman Cross in 1837 observed that

Nothing is more important, in a military view, than the communications from the posts on the frontier to the depots in the interior; but those *between* the several stations on the line of the frontier are not, in my opinion, entitled to the consequence which has been ascribed to them. The great "military road," as it is called, now in progress from the Upper Mississippi to Red river, runing beyond our boundary line, through the Indian country, and intended to connect our frontier posts with each other, originated, I think, in a very erroneous estimate of its importance for purposes of defence.[109]

Again, a north-south line on a military map of about 1850 connects various western forts and bears this caption: "Extreme limit of [the] line of frontier stations on the 30th June 1845." [110] For a final illustration, in 1854 President Franklin Pierce reacted in this way to recent Indian incursions:

The experience of the last year furnishes additional reasons, . . . for the recommendation heretofore made to provide for increasing the military force employed in the Territory inhabited by the Indians. . . . From the garrisons of our frontier posts it is [at present] only possible to detach troops in small bodies; . . . wholly inadequate to the protection which should be afforded.[111]

The third line, the line of settlement, came to define the western frontier after the other two were no longer conceptually adequate. As we have seen, the use of "frontier" as a political boundary was already obsolete by 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of that year effectively eliminated any possibility of a revival of such usage. The old line was severed by the new federal territories, and subsequent years saw further fragmentation. The second line, the military line, vanished. It nearly disappeared during the Civil War, when most of the troops were withdrawn from the West. After the war, the line

[103] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 607.
[104] *Ibid.* **2**: p. 865.
[105] *Territorial Papers* **21**: p. 900.
[106] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **7**: p. 779.
[107] *Ibid.* **6**: p. 149.
[108] Catlin, **2**: p. 423.
[109] *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **7**: p. 783.
[110] Carl I. Wheat, "Mapping the American West, 1540–1857," *Proc. Amer. Antiq. Soc.* **64** (1954): pp. 125–126.
[111] Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents* **4**: p. 2819.

was not restored. Instead, military posts were placed near centers of Indian power or along strategic arteries of communication. The distribution of forts no longer suggested a simple geometric line. After the Civil War the only line which could possibly suggest a north-south demarcation in the plains region was the line of white population.

There were of course a few who used "frontier" in the new sense before the Civil War, when the line of settlement was but one of three potential defining lines. I have found what appear to be two such examples. Although it is not entirely clear that either of them represents the new usage, both deserve quotation as probable early illustrations of this important change in the word's meaning. The first is contained in an 1826 report of Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark:

> The presence of agents, clothed with the authority of the United States, would probably be sufficient to prevent the chiefs from killing one another, and to prevent different tribes from attacking each other, or committing depredations upon the white people; but, to make sure of this, a show of troops is necessary, and some military posts ought to be established along the frontier of white settlements; . . . .[112]

The second is found in Secretary of the Interior Thomas Ewing's report for 1849:

> Some means of communication across the continent . . . is necessary to meet the wants of our citizens on either coast, and is equally necessary to aid the government in controlling the Indian tribes of the intermediate country, and in protecting from their depredations our two lines of frontier settlements, which will now gradually approach each other.[113]

After the war such usage steadily became more common, and by the 1880's, stood dominant. Thus a writer in *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine* in 1869 observed that "there was a period . . . when the Alleghany Mountains formed the frontier of settlement and agricultural production."[114] Historian Francis Parkman did his great writing during this period of transition to the new meaning of "frontier." Parkman usually employed the word in contexts vague enough to bear several interpretations, but sometimes he clearly used the new definition, as in this 1877 sentence: "The exposed frontier of New England was between two and three hundred miles long, and consisted of farms and hamlets loosely scattered through an almost impervious forest."[115] For a final illustration, in the first chapter of his *Frontiersmen of New York* (1882), Jeptha Simms alerted his readers as follows:

> The term *border* [or *frontier*] as often used by the writer, is not to be construed to mean the outer verge of the State —for that extended westward from the territory indicated, . . . but as having especial reference to the outskirts of civilization, or to those scattered settlements jutting out here and there into venturesome clearings, beyond the protection of what were beginning to be known as older settlements.[116]

The fact that Simms thought this precautionary note necessary again testifies to the novelty of such usage.

It will be noted that the Parkman and Simms examples cited above indicate a reversion to an areal conception of "frontier." It was unquestionably easier and more practical to imagine settlement defining an area, rather than a line. Advanced settlements were much more numerous and transitory than forts or boundary markers, steadily becoming more so, and it was really quite impossible to keep track of them accurately. It made more sense to speak of a general area than a line you could not locate. It was at about the same time that the Census Office offered its own peculiar solution to the difficulty.

Superintendent of the Census Francis A. Walker called attention to the problem in 1873 in an article he wrote for the *North American Review:*

> Instead of exposing to Indian contact, as heretofore, a clearly defined frontier line, upon two or three faces, our settlements have [lately] penetrated the Western country in every direction and from every direction. . . .[117]

This difficulty apparently was resolved for Walker, so far as it could be resolved, by his close associate Henry Gannett. It was Gannett, a Geographer and Special Agent in the Census Office, who in 1882 said:

> an arbitrary line must be drawn somewhere beyond which the country must be considered as unsettled, although it may not be absolutely without inhabitants. Such a line may be properly taken so as to exclude regions having less than two inhabitants to a square mile.[118]

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[112] *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **2**: p. 654.

[113] U. S. Cong., *House Exec. Doc.*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., 1849–1850, ser. 570, no. 5, p. 13.

[114] Quoted in Turner, p. 195.

[115] Francis Parkman, *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV* (Boston, 1905), p. 390.

[116] Simms, **1**: p 13.

[117] Reprinted in Walker, *The Indian Question* (Boston, 1874), p. 38.

[118] Quoted in Mood, "The Concept of the Frontier, 1871–1898," *Ag. Hist.* **19** (1945): p. 28.

The Census Office adopted this formulation. The frontier line was now arbitrarily fixed, defined statistically. Furthermore, the completed census maps acted to strengthen the revitalized areal conception of the western frontier. A number of similar arbitrary lines, delineating the furthest extent of larger population densities, were drawn further east. The result of interest to us was that at the western extreme of these maps appeared a "frontier zone," the western area with a population of between two and six per square mile. Since the basis of demarcation for this frontier area at any given time was an arbitrary statistical interval of data compiled from the previous census, on the census maps it appeared to be a district exactly bounded on all sides. Taking the time dimension into account, this frontier area remained stationary and fixed in size and shape for a decade at a time. With each succeeding census, it assumed a new fixed position and a new spatial configuration. This unique species of "frontier" embodied a conception that was practically inapplicable for any purposes other than map-making and the tabulation of census data, and of little influence, except perhaps as a challenge to the imagination of Frederick Jackson Turner. Let us now look briefly at his innovations.

If the territorial extent of American population was to continue to define an areal frontier in the West, the census data were the only available empirical guide for locating it precisely. In Turner's day the alternative to arbitrary limits thus produced was no limits at all, and this is what Turner was led to. He made a bow to the Census Office's frontier zone of "settled area," but understandably refused to confine himself to writing about such a patently artificial construct. His "frontier" was not bounded exactly on any side, a general area only. It was, moreover, an even fuzzier and more flexible conception than those evident in the above illustrations from Parkman and Simms, for Turner did not accept Anglo-American settlement as the sole criterion for defining it. This can be seen from his statement that the Indian Country could be considered to form part of it. Other of the novel criteria he introduced were the environmental and sociological conditions he supposed had always characterized the western frontier—"free land," democratic institutions, etc.

Perhaps stimulated by the depiction of zones of population density on the census maps, Turner proceeded to subdivide his "frontier" into a similar wave pattern. Speaking of traders, ranchers, miners, and farmers, he stated that

> Each passed in successive waves across the continent. . . . The unequal rate of advance compels us to distinguish the frontier into the trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, or the miner's frontier, and the farmer's frontier.[119]

These frontier subdivisions, if anything less precisely located than the whole, are clearly Turner's inventions. I have found no similar expressions in earlier sources.

Turner went on to use "frontier" as a concept altogether divorced from territory. He used the word in various theoretical contexts to mean a "form of society," a "state of mind," a "stage of society rather than a place," or a "process." [120] There was nothing new about using the term in a figurative way. Knapp, for example, described John Marshall's *Life of George Washington* as "a monument of stability—a pyramid of granite, of majestic dimensions, that will stand in the waste of time on the frontiers of our history." [121] But it is quite a logical leap from utilizing the "outer edge" idea of "frontier" figuratively, to employing the word as meaning an abstract process or state of being. Before Turner "frontier" had meanings that were concrete, if often difficult to apply. With his work the word became abstract, and his early followers made it even more so.

Another innovation can be seen in Turner's use of "frontiersmen" synonymously with "Westerners" or "pioneers." In his hands, it was a laudatory generic term for all western pioneer settlers. In fact, before Turner this term was neither generic nor very complimentary, and had no direct logical connection with the West, pioneering, or even permanent settlement.[122] A frontiersman was an adult *male* who frequented the frontiers. The term was analogous to "seaman," "mountain man," "cattle man," or "Indian countryman." When a more general meaning was intended, terms like "frontier people," "frontier inhabitants," or "frontier settlers" were employed, and we also find expressions like "frontier woman" and "frontier girl." The word "frontiersman" carried an unpleasant connotation of marginal civilization,

[119] Turner, p. 12.

[120] Ray A. Billington, *The American Frontier* (Washington, 1958), p. 9.

[121] Samuel L. Knapp, *Lectures on American Literature, with Remarks on Some Passages of American History* (New York, 1829), p. 128.

[122] For a recent, unflattering, and I think accurate description of the Kentucky frontiersman, see: Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (Lexington, Ky., 1957).

being most generally applied to scouts, traders, and Indian fighters. Its only true synonyms were "borderer," and more rarely, "borderman."

A few illustrations will have to suffice here. In 1831 Withers wrote of several hardy hunters, who "had been for some time frontier's men, and were familiar with the scenes usually exhibited on remote and unprotected borders."[123] Two years later Timothy Flint noted that "the white borderers have too often been more savage, than the Indians themselves."[124] In *The Pathfinder* (1840), Cooper has his wilderness hero relate that "we bordermen handle the paddle and the spear almost as much as the rifle and the hunting-knife."[125] Another nineteenth-century writer concluded his account of the famous Whetzel brothers and their adventures with this informative afterthought:

> It is not claimed that all the old frontier men were such dare-devils as were the Whetzels. If they had been, the country could never have been settled. The men who went forward with families, and erected block houses, and forts, and remained stationary to defend them, and to cultivate the earth, were the most efficient settlers.—The Whetzels, and others of the same grit, served as [a] kind of outguards, who were continually ranging from station to station in search of adventure; . . . .[126]

It is also instructive to note that so long as the boundary line between Indians and whites remained visible similar terms were applied to Indians. Thus in 1844 Josiah Gregg wrote the following:

> For the purpose of a somewhat more discriminating notice of the Indian tribes beyond our western border . . . I will distinguish them, according to the prevailing classification of the West, as "Frontier" or "Border Indians," which title includes those occupying that district lying west of and immediately adjoining Arkansas and Missouri, and known as the *Indian Territory;* and the "Wild Tribes" or "Prairie Indians," by which are meant those who are found west of the others, and who range those immense plains from the borders of the Indian Territory to the Rocky Mountains.[127]

As the Indian Country disintegrated and the location of the frontier became doubtful, such terminology as applied to whites grew rare, and as applied to Indians, disappeared. Furthermore, as the Indian danger waned, more and more respectable sorts of white men migrated to the frontier. As a result, the pejorative implications of "frontiersmen" and similar expressions gradually faded, but it was Turner who first used this term as an altogether favorable appellation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Frederick Jackson Turner began his "frontier" essay by setting up a false dichotomy. Contrary to his view, American usage of the word "frontier" did not differ significantly from European usage until the post-Civil War era. Moreover, Turner was mistaken about both sides of his inequation; he drastically simplified both European and American usage. Since he never pretended to be learned in European history, Turner's mistaken views on European frontiers can readily be overlooked. But this great American historian's erroneous characterization of what his earlier countrymen meant by "frontier" cannot be. It has led to misinterpretation of the documents dealing with the nation's westward expansion, and hence, to misunderstanding the history of that long process.

Historians in the Turnerian tradition usually define the frontier as the western area characterized by certain environmental and social conditions, the most basic of which is sparse population. The same authors often simultaneously insist, in effect, that the frontier was not one, but many. Thus we find frequent references to "farmer's frontiers" and the like, or to pioneers moving to new frontiers, leaving the old ones behind. These two views of the western frontier(s) are not easily reconcilable, but more important, both are anachronistic. Neither reflects, both contradict, the point of view of previous generations of Americans who actually were involved in the westward movement.

As we have seen, the first of these views is inaccurate for most of the history of American expansion, for it was not until after the Civil War that population generally defined the location of the western frontier. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that before the Revolution there was not one, but thirteen separately defined frontiers in the area which later became the United States—one for each colony. As yet Americans did not conceive of a single unified frontier, although the

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[123] Withers, p. 74.

[124] Quoted in Washburn, *The Indian and the White Man,* p. 126.

[125] Cooper, *The Pathfinder,* p. 18.

[126] Pritts, p. 532 (quoting a contemporary magazine article by "John M'Donald, of Ohio").

[127] Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies,* ed. Max L. Moorhead (Norman, 1954), p. 397. For other examples of such compounds with "frontier," see: Strachey, p. 179; *Amer. St. Pap.: Ind. Aff.* **1**: p. 53; and *Amer. St. Pap.: Mil. Aff.* **7**: p. 578. Similar illustrations with "border" can be found in the *Dictionary of American English,* q. v. "border."

establishment of the Indian boundary line in 1765 assured that this could not be far off.

The second, pluralistic, view of American frontiers has no relevance to the period before the Revolution, and is inaccurate for the period following it. One of the by-products of American independence was a unitary frontier—the national frontier, defined as the external border or boundary of the United States. When the nation made any particular territorial advance, a new frontier was not created; the frontier simply moved from one place to another. It was not defined by the particular location in which it existed, or by the particular environment. Differing physiographic or sociological conditions did not produce different kinds of frontiers. When the frontier was subdivided, those factors played no part at all, for it was always divided into regional sectors, never into developmental "stages." Thus, the frontier was frequently subdivided according to the elements on the exterior of the nation—European nations (including Mexico), Indians, or the sea. The result was a number of international, Indian, and maritime frontiers. More often, but less significantly, the principle of division was based on the internal geography of the nation. As many different internal criteria could be used to subdivide the frontier as the nation itself. As a result, there was a bewildering variety of such subdivision, with one kind of sub-frontier overlapping others—e.g., western frontier, Missouri frontier, Jackson County frontier; northern frontier, northeastern frontier, Niagara frontier, etc., etc.

It is when we find the frontier segmented according to internal rather than external criteria that we seem to receive a number of independently defined frontiers. This appearance of multiplicity notwithstanding, and despite the fact that until about 1830 Americans generally employed "frontier" in the plural, it remains true that after the Revolution there was fundamentally only one frontier. It was well recognized that these smaller frontiers were simply component parts of the national frontier, just as, say, the population or territory of the West, Missouri, and Jackson County were parts of the nation's population or territory. Yet since nineteenth-century Americans devoted so much of their attention to the western frontier, and later writers have so frequently referred to it as *the* frontier, too often we overlook the fact that until the post-Civil War era it was a subdivision of a larger whole, not a unique and independent phenomenon.

The western frontier was not only important for all the familiar reasons, but linguistically as well. The changing nature of the territorial relations of whites and Indians on that frontier was at bottom responsible for all important developments in American usage of "frontier." It will be helpful to review those developments within a broader linguistic framework.

The idea of confrontation was implicit in the traditional European conception of a frontier as a limit. A people's geographical confinement by the sea (or other uninhabited areas like mountains, deserts, and lakes) is seldom significant historically, but confrontations with other peoples invariably are. Such confrontations gave "frontiers" political, military, and cultural strata of connotative meaning. Although I have no linguistic evidence, certain facts bearing on the territorial relations of Anglo-Americans and Indians appear to justify some speculation about the American development of these layers of meaning in the word "frontier." It seems to me that these conotative aspects of the word were added in the following order: cultural, military, and finally, political.

The early history of the first successful English colony in America, Virginia, suggests that this sort of conceptual development of "frontier" probably did take place. In the first years of the colony, the territorial relationship of whites and Indians was ambiguous and unsettled. Rigid separation of the two populations was not yet an accomplished fact. The English settlers were scattered, some even living in Indian villages. Such confrontation as there was between the two peoples was between two ways of life, a cultural juxtaposition not reducible to geographical terms. There was as yet no military or political confrontation that could be well represented territorially. We begin to see the former developing after 1622, the year of the first great Indian massacre, when the Indians surprised and killed hundreds of Englishmen in outlying settlements. For the most part, only those living near Jamestown survived. English policy immediately changed in favor of separation, and after peace had been restored the colonists erected a line of forts and palisades between themselves and the Indians. The territorial division was now unmistakably clear, and the confrontation had taken on a military aspect. Still later, in 1646, the Virginians

negotiated a land cession treaty with the remnants of the Powhatan Confederacy. This was apparently the first such treaty negotiated by any English colony. The practice was quickly adopted by other colonies, and as a result, political boundaries were laid out. The confrontation of the English and the Indians had acquired a political aspect. Now the confrontation and the concept of the "frontier" were connotatively fully developed.[128]

Two centuries later, in the Midwest, the reverse process occurred, and here it is possible concretely to relate the process to the word "frontier." The several strata of connotative meaning of the fully developed concept were stripped off one by one. The order of this consecutive subtraction was the inverse of that which I have supposed characterized the earlier addition. First the political connotations of the term began to wane, then the military, and finally the cultural. We can see this process of conceptual delamination occurring after the three potential lines of demarcation for the western frontier began to diverge. In the early nineteenth century, it will be recalled, it was the political line which usually marked the frontier. This conception of the frontier was connotatively complete, but with the near disintegration of the Indian Country, the political aspect of the western frontier began to disappear. By the 1830's the military line was more often used to delimit the frontier. But the military stratum of meaning was also fading, and by mid-century some Americans could detect only a cultural confrontation between whites and Indians, one difficult to envision very precisely in geographical terms. Turner's use of the word "frontier" might be considered to have begun in this stage, for in one place he described it as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." [129] Here we have a vaguely defined confrontation between two populations, now more distinct culturally than territorially. Later, after the Civil War, with no significant confrontation any longer evident, the "frontier" came to refer to only one of these populations, the American. The United States had come to border (from two sides) simply on an "uninhabited" region.

A similar rhythm characterized the denotative development of "frontier." In colonial and early national times the term usually referred to an area rather than a line. In the nineteenth century we saw the trend from the areal "border" conception of "frontier" to the linear "boundary" definition. The new American meaning of the word was a return to the areal view. In Europe and early America a "frontier" referred to only one of the peoples in a confrontation situation, for it designated only one of two abutting border areas. Later, as the word came to mean a line, a "common frontier," it did not refer to either people exclusively, but to both. When Americans no longer thought of themselves as being confronted in the West by Indians, but only by an ambiguous near-emptyness, they returned to a one-sided conception. Thus the new American meaning of "frontier" was probably not really new at all. The same concept could probably be found in early Virginia and early European history. The American sense of the word may simply be the most attenuated conception possible, a skeletal idea stripped of more precise and refined overlays of meaning.

The bafflingly vague status of western territories after the Civil War forced Americans to alter the meaning of "frontier" for use in the West. For other of their frontiers, Americans of the last century never departed from the sophisticated usage of contemporary Europe. But even with the passing of the anomalous territorial situation which produced it, the "new" American usage of the word persisted. Even today historians use it constantly, and unlike earlier Americans, often to describe frontiers other than the one in the late-nineteenth-century West.

It was the preoccupation of Turner and his followers with "the advance of the frontier" which elevated the word "frontier" to a key position in the American vocabulary of expansion. As we have seen, until the late nineteenth century it had not been an expansive, but a limiting word. Furthermore, "frontier" had long been far too precise in meaning to hold any but a minor place in the language of expansion. Expansionists before the end of the last century rarely talked about frontiers (except "natural frontiers," always more extensive than existing ones), for precision and limitation were anathema to them. Let us now turn to consider the historiographic implications of this study.

When Turner formulated his "frontier hypothesis" his aim was to provide a unifying theme which ran through the whole history of the Ameri-

[128] MacLeod, chap. 14; Richard Lee Morton, *Colonial Virginia* (2 v., Chapel Hill, 1960) **1**: pp. 73–85, 123–124, 153–156.

[129] Turner, p. 3.

can people (including the long period before there was an American nation), a theme which at the same time clearly differentiated America from Europe. Turner found his theme in "the advance of the frontier," which, he said, "has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines." It was this advance which "explain[ed] American development."[130] By skillfully elaborating this thesis Turner became the United States' first important nationalist historian, for earlier scholars like Sparks, Bancroft, and Hildreth had not succeeded in discovering such an all-encompassing yet uniquely American theme.[131] Most earlier historians doubtless had felt that there was something distinctive about the development of the United States, but no one before Turner had been able to explain convincingly why this might be so.

In order to sustain his position that the advance of the "frontier" was the key to the "first period" of American history (all of it before 1890), Turner necessarily relied on the "new" American definition of the word. Only this sense of "frontier," defined as it was by an ever-advancing population, could have the desired expansive connotations. The fact that this concept appeared to be a uniquely American product contributed no small measure to the credibility of Turner's thesis. If only it was supposed that this new kind of frontier, this new sense of the word, existed almost from the beginning of American history, the logical chain was completed and on internal grounds the thesis became almost unchallengable. Ignorant of the linguistic facts, everyone in the spell of Turner's eloquence made this ill-founded assumption.

How well Turner himself understood earlier American usage of "frontier" is a matter for conjecture. Several times he hinted that he knew that the distinctive American definition of the word did not go back to the very beginning, as when he said that in America the term had "come to mean" the edge of white settlement. Perhaps he knew more about this than he was willing to say, but probably he was happily unaware of how recent the new definition actually was. Suppose for a moment that he had been well informed on this point. In that event, if he had said that he was using a new concept to organize American history, he could not have failed to be less persuasive to his audience. Nothing calls forth opposition like new ideas. Turner achieved a sudden dominance over the writing of American history largely because no one perceived how new and original his ideas actually were. He owed much of his reputation to the seeming fact that he had been keen enough to discover the obvious, something which everyone else should have seen but didn't. Turner's contemporaries belittled earlier American historians for their supposed blindness, ignorant of the fact that no scholar who had lived much earlier *could have* discovered the pervasive influence of "the frontier," because a few decades before this new kind of frontier was scarcely perceived by anyone.

Turner thought of himself as a social evolutionist; but, ironically, in one crucial respect his work had a contradictory tendency. By ignoring earlier American conceptions of frontiers, and employing only the one common in his own day, what he was really doing was reading a late nineteenth-century world view back into the past.[132] In so doing, he imposed an artificial unity on an important aspect of American intellectual history, thus in effect denying evolutionary development in this area. For Turner, American ideas and attitudes on frontiers had not changed significantly over two and a half centuries. In fact, they had undergone an important evolution, although in the last sixty years of the period it was more properly a devolution.

Thus, in order to sharpen the two cutting edges of his thesis, Turner was guilty, consciously or not, of two basic linguistic exaggerations. In the interest of upholding American uniqueness, he overestimated the distinctiveness of American usage of "frontier" as compared with that of Europe. In the interest of making this theme all-encompassing, he exaggerated the extent to which the "new" usage had been employed in America.

I do not wish to leave the impression that I believe that modern concepts can never be used to characterize earlier periods; quite the contrary. The point is that it must always be made clear that such concepts would have been unfamiliar to the people of the past, that they had different ideas. Used in this way modern concepts add an

[130] *Ibid.*, pp. 1–4.

[131] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), chap. 41.

[132] Jack D. Forbes, "Frontiers in American History," *Journal of the West* **1** (1962): pp. 63–73. Forbes has anticipated me on this point and several others; on still other points, we disagree.

extra dimension to the history of a previous period, one characteristic of your own day. And, of course, if other concepts from intervening periods are employed, other dimensions are added. Ideas from more recent times can supplant and often dominate those from the era being described, but they can never supplant the older concepts as the proper starting points for any historical investigation.

To conclude on a more general note, all historians know that they must be familiar with the vocabulary of the age they are describing, but it seems to me that all too many fail to put linguistic studies to profitable use. Scholars would do well, I believe, to concern themselves less with increasing the size of their archaic vocabulary and more to tracing the development of fewer, more important terms through longer time intervals. The former kind of study, one result of excessive specialization, is random, extensive, and relatively static—a "horizontal" view of a language at a given time: the latter is selective, intensive, and evolutionary—a "vertical" picture of the development of more significant concepts and usages through time. If for no other reason, the latter kind of study should be encouraged because of its usefulness as a guide for meaningful periodization. In an age when intellectual history is in vogue, it seems odd that of all things, the history of common and important concepts should suffer such neglect.[133]

[133] The following are the only other such studies that I know of: E. Cannan, "Early History of the Term Capital," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* **35** (1920–1921): pp. 469–481 (see also, *ibid.* **40** [1925–1926]: pp. 329–338, 547–548); Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (2 v., Princeton, 1959–1964) **1**: pp. 13–20 (on "democrat" and "aristocrat"); Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, 1963), pp. 34–52 (for the word "revolution"); and Richard Koebner, *Empire* (New York, 1961). Koebner's study of "empire" and related words is in a class by itself for scope and detailed analysis.